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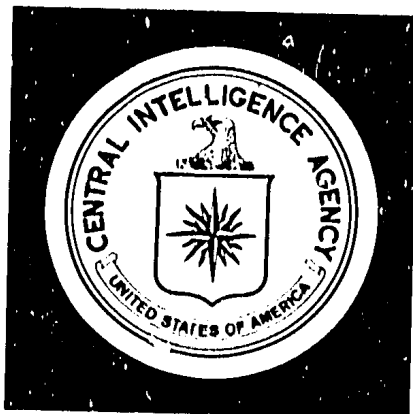
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The United Nations: Problems Continue, Potential Erodes

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THE UNITED NATIONS: PROBLEMS CONTINUE, POTENTIAL ERODES*

The CIA/OPR study, *The United Nations: Problems and Potential*, was published last September just as the UN opened its 29th General Assembly, a session which was to become one of the most tumultuous and publicized of recent years. That study offered several judgments concerning the problems of a UN increasingly hostile to US policies:

- The UN, which reflects far more than it influences the basic trends in world politics, only mirrors the fundamental conflicts in interests and ideologies between less developed countries (LDCs) and industrialized states.
- As the wealthiest state in a forum dominated by a cohesive LDC majority, the US is unavoidably the chief target of their substantive and ideological grievances.
- The benefits derived by the US from the operations of the Security Council and the specialized agencies have served to counterbalance the liabilities of repeated diplomatic defeats in the General Assembly.

While the performance of the 29th General Assembly has not altered these assessments, it has indicated a new development that may increase the problems and erode the remaining potential of the UN.

- LDCs appear to be altering their primary objectives from seeking financial and technical assistance to seeking fundamental revisions of international practices and institutions.

These demands are potentially far more threatening to the interests of Western powers than the demands for aid which have dominated LDC activities for the past decade. Like the more traditional LDC activities, the pressures for revision originate

* This assessment is in response to a request by the Director, Central Intelligence for an updating of *The United Nations: Problems and Potential*, published on 11 September 1974. Both papers were prepared by CIA's Office of Political Research under the auspices of the National Intelligence Officer for Western Europe. The views represent the best judgments of the issuing office, which is aware that the complex issues discussed lend themselves to other interpretations. For further information about this study, please call [REDACTED] code 143, extension 5441.

in and are governed by developments outside the UN. If general relations between the US and the LDCs were to continue to deteriorate, the revisionist efforts could soon undercut the residual benefits the US derives from the Security Council and the specialized agencies.

Ingredients: Two Old, One New

The 1974 General Assembly drew unaccustomed governmental and public scrutiny to the UN. By the close of the ten-week session, Yasir Arafat had addressed the Assembly, Israel had been muzzled in open debate, South Africa had been suspended, and expropriation of foreign investments had been sanctified. LDCs achieved each of these victories by applying their two-thirds majority with considerable efficiency and little restraint. As LDC victories accumulated, Western industrialized members -- not quite resigned to the role of automatic minority -- became increasingly restive. Western representatives suggested that the Assembly, under such circumstances, had little utility for their governments. A growing sense of institutional crisis transformed the Assembly's closing agenda item, "strengthening the organization," into an exchange of grievances. For three days delegates of industrial and developing states joined in a dialogue in which the UN became a metaphor for their mutually unsatisfactory relations.

Despite the rhetoric and the drama, little that was new or unexpected occurred during the session; familiar problems merely continued to erode the potential of the organization. The Assembly had reflected, and would continue to reflect, the clashes of interests and ideologies between the LDCs and the industrial states of the West; the Assembly remained at most a well-publicized site of battle, at least a small side show of global antagonisms. The industrialized communist countries also face increasing conflicts of interest with LDCs. The communist states do not, however, face as many ideological stresses in their LDC relations as does the West, and they have worked hard to maintain the appearance of cooperation with LDCs in UN diplomacy. In the 29th Assembly, both China and the European communist states assumed generally passive postures on LDC issues, often abstaining or giving token consent to policies which they expected to have few reverberations beyond UN halls.

The 29th Assembly, therefore, sustained the pattern of LDC control which has marked UN politics for over a decade -- a pattern which has transformed the UN from a forum that readily supported US Cold War policies to an arena which now just as readily castigates US postures on global issues. So long as the antagonism between developing countries and industrialized states continues in the world outside, the confrontations in the General Assembly -- and Washington's embattled position there -- are unlikely to change.

The Assembly's recycling of familiar issues provoked unusual political responses because its proceedings were embellished by high visibility, particularly well-managed LDC solidarity, and a shift of emphasis in LDC objectives.* While each of these factors helps to explain the atmosphere of the 1974 General Assembly, only the last represents a newly significant development.

High Visibility: This session sparked unusually strong reactions to essentially predictable tendencies because its proceedings were highly dramatic and therefore well publicized. The decision to include the Palestine Liberation Organization in the annual Middle East debate was largely a reflection by the UN of an accomplished fact: Arab support for the PLO at Rabat had established the group's claim for a voice in Middle East negotiations. Nor was Arafat the first non-member to address the Assembly, although his status as a guerrilla leader and the tension surrounding his presence in New York City assured his appearance at the UN much greater notice than Pope Paul's in 1965.

* The LDC caucusing group in the UN is still called the "Group of 77" although its membership has expanded to over 100 Latin American, African, Asian, and Oceania countries. With the increase in size has also come an increase in diversity. During this session one of the most important internal divisions was between oil-wealthy Arab states and their less fortunate allies many of whom, such as India, were more severely affected by soaring oil prices than Western states. Outside of the UN, the primary organization of LDC solidarity is the non-aligned movement. The non-aligned movement has a smaller membership -- approximately 80 states -- and is generally considered to be more radical than the "Group of 77."

Algerian Foreign Minister Bouteflika's rulings from the president's chair were frequently arbitrary and calculated to LDC advantage.* His restriction of Israeli rights of reply in the Middle East debate stimulated particularly strong public reactions. As disturbing as such acts were, however, they were only illustrations of the established fact of LDC dominance in the Assembly. Bouteflika's rulings were more demonstrations of the latitude permitted an officer supported by two-thirds of the membership than a significant increment in LDC influence in the Assembly. A president without such a secure position in the LDC caucus could have been voted down on points of order when his rulings went beyond precedent and common practice. When Poland held the presidency in 1972, Ambassador Trepczynski also enjoyed solid LDC backing and stretched the standards of parliamentary procedures with only slightly less bravado and notoriety.

LDC Solidarity: The increased impact of LDC cooperation in the Assembly was more the result of better parliamentary management than of an actual growth in political cohesion. The twin victories of the PLO invitation and the South African suspension were, for example, the result of a basic *quid pro quo* exchange of support among African and Arab members. Carefully orchestrated by Tanzanian Ambassador Salim, these votes were the product of long preparation, not of an automatic majority. The Korean and Cambodian votes -- two issues of strong US interest -- provide a sharp contrast. US policies carried, despite formal opposition by the LDC caucus. The Asian LDC countries most concerned did not mount a lobbying campaign strong enough to convince members from other regions that these essentially East-West confrontations were issues of vital importance to the LDC cause.**

* A new assembly president is elected for each session. In practice, the presidency has been rotated among regional groups. A president's powers include according the right to speak, ruling on points of order, limiting speaking time, and closing debate (Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly, rule 35). In exercising such prerogatives, however, the president remains under the authority of the General Assembly (rule 36).

** The perennial Korean and Cambodian agenda items have, in fact, become anachronisms; they are essentially questions of East-West confrontation in and Assembly which is increasingly tuned only to LDC concerns. The Korean question again centered on whether foreign troops and the UN Command should remain in Korea. Communist states have strongly opposed the continuation of this vestige of the Korean peacekeeping operation under whose flag US troops remain in Korea. The Cambodian question -- Prince Sihanouk's challenge to the Khmer government's right to represent Cambodia -- is essentially a credentials issue. The Communist positions narrowly failed to carry on both questions.

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Shift in LDC Objectives: During the 29th General Assembly, LDCs appeared to shift the priority of their efforts from economic and technical aid to fundamental revisions of international institutions and the patterns of diplomatic and commercial exchanges in order to gain "sovereign equality" with industrialized powers. This shift in emphasis from the aid programs which dominated their concerns for the past decade to redistribution of authority represents a second dimension of the LDC movement -- a dimension which is potentially more disruptive to US interests as well as to UN operations. While efforts to make international arrangements more favorable to their interests have been of growing importance in the LDCs' activities for some time, the 29th Assembly may mark the point at which such goals became their major objective.

The timing is most likely the result of developments outside of the UN during 1974: the oil embargo and economic dislocations in the industrial world. The embargo and oil price revisions provided a dramatic example of success in changing established practices and in redistributing power. Whether or not the OPEC model is a realistic example for other LDC groups, it has given them greater self-confidence to contemplate such challenges to the industrialized world and its ordained institutions. The recessions and severe inflation which have weakened Western economies have also presented a new and disturbing possibility to the LDCs: the West may no longer be able to provide much financial assistance. This perception reinforces the logic of demanding better terms on which to compete with the West rather than relying primarily on aid programs whose effectiveness many LDCs now question; it also implies less reason for cooperating with Western powers. Because the economic dislocations have been international as well as domestic, LDC attention has also been focused on updating the global economic institutions imposed by the industrial powers after World War II. Many LDCs feel that they are demanding not concessions but only recognition of fundamental changes -- reduction of Western power and growth of LDC influence -- which are already taking place in international politics.

The tumultuous atmosphere of the 29th General Assembly should, in part, be attributed to this growing uncertainty in international standards. The Assembly's debates took place in an international environment in which there are few shared ideals, common perceptions of danger, or accepted rules of the game. Each group struggles to insure that anticipated new rules will be drawn up to favor its interests. The result is confusion, and confusion encourages those striving to alter the status quo.

Approval of the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties was the clearest indicator of the shift in LDC priorities.* An encore to last spring's special session on raw materials, the Charter was approved despite two years of determined Western opposition. It was carried by 120 out of 136 votes: full LDC and Communist support with Western members opposing or abstaining.

The Economic Charter postulates revisions of international trade and business practices. Its most important section, Article II, sanctifies the right to "nationalize, expropriate, or transfer ownership of foreign property" without the international safeguards of full and fair compensation so long demanded by the West. The Charter also declares the right of all states to participate in international decision-making concerning economic, financial, and monetary problems, along with a litany of other rights which LDCs believe are necessary to permit them economic equality with industrialized states. The immediate practical impact of such a Charter is questionable. It should, however, be evaluated less in pragmatic terms than as a manifesto of LDC goals.

The Economic Charter is a declaration of intent to change practice. Its consequences will only gradually become apparent, but other LDC efforts to revise international institutions may yield more immediate results. Codified procedures offer easier targets than commercial practices. One of the last acts of the 29th General Assembly was to call for a special conference in the summer of 1975 to discuss proposals for revising the UN Charter.**

* *The Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States was proposed in the May 1972 session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. UNCTAD then created a 40-member working group, to "establish generally accepted norms to govern international economic relations," which drafted the Charter. Mexico's President Echeverria became closely identified with the Charter and accepted its approval as a personal victory in his campaign to extend his influence as an LDC leader. Considering the sharp rivalries among LDC leaders, it is not surprising that some other LDC spokesmen have unofficially expressed ambivalence towards the Charter and Mexico's position in the movement.*

** *Article 108 provides that Charter amendments may be proposed by a two-thirds vote of the General Assembly and ratified by two-thirds of the UN membership, subject however to vetoes by the five permanent Security Council members. This procedure was followed for the 1965 amendment to increase the number of non-permanent Security Council members. The 1950 "uniting for peace" resolution provides an example, however, of fundamental charter reform by a resolution. Initiated by the US, the resolution provides that when the Security Council is unable to act on a matter which threatens international peace, the Assembly may take actions including the use of armed forces. LDCs could decide to follow this example and attempt to alter UN procedures through Assembly resolutions which, of course, are not subject to vetoes.*

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Contemplated reforms focus on the special prerogatives given major powers under the 1945 agreement. LDCs may, for example, propose Charter revisions which would give veto powers to additional Council members by creating permanent regional seats. An African and Asian permanent seat holder might then exercise the same veto powers as now held by the current permanent members -- the US, USSR, China, United Kingdom, and France. Under present arrangements LDCs can only block decisions of the 15-member Council if they muster seven votes against or in abstention, thereby denying a resolution the requisite nine affirmative votes.

The institutional targets of LDCs also include international conferences and technical organizations. For some time, LDCs have protested special representation formulas and other advantages usually enjoyed by the five permanent Security Council members in such gatherings. Preparations for the Caracas Law of the Sea (LOS) Conference, for example, were delayed by a challenge to the hitherto-automatic US seat on conference committees. The substantive LOS negotiations, like most global conferences in recent years, have also been shaped by the contrapositions between developing countries and industrial powers, with LDCs seeking to barter their majority consent in exchange for authority and economic benefits under any new international agreements.

LDCs have also shown increasing willingness to exploit their voting strength in technical organizations and hold the operation of such bodies hostage to their political goals of redistributing representation and power. They have injected special causes, such as recognition of revolutionary movements, into deliberations of UN specialized agencies charged with coordination of industrial, commercial, and social affairs.* Although LDC solidarity in these

* Sixteen intergovernmental agencies are associated with the General Assembly under the umbrella of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). They are: International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), International Labor Organization (ILO), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), World Health Organization (WHO), International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank or IBRD), International Finance Corporation (IFC), International Development Association (IDA), International Monetary Fund (IMF), International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), Universal Postal Union (UPU), International Telecommunication Union (ITU), World Meteorological Organization (WMO), Inter-Government Maritime Consultative Organization (IMCO), General Agreement of Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).

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agencies does not yet approach the militancy found in the Assembly, it has begun to impede the agencies' supposedly apolitical work. Since the substantive work of these technical organizations is much less vital to the LDCs than to industrialized states with global commercial interests, LDC voting majorities in these agencies are yet another pressure point. Having long heard the theme of an interdependent world, LDCs are now prepared to ask if the Western world can afford not to have their cooperation. In short, LDCs are developing more leverage -- along with new confidence and skill -- to exert in their many points of contention with the West.

Changing Balance

The US position in the UN continued to deteriorate in the 29th General Assembly. While the general US position in world politics may also have weakened in recent years, UN politics magnify the particularly troublesome field of relations with LDCs -- one of the most difficult and least rewarding areas of US relations.

Meanwhile the UN itself is an organization with decreasing usefulness not just for the US but for all its members. The General Assembly is losing its potential to function as anything other than a forum for airing LDC complaints. As noise levels rise and tolerance levels drop, the Assembly's tumultuous atmosphere overrides its substantive concerns. The proliferation of special conferences attempting to do the work of the Assembly is a symptom of its degeneration.* The increased emphasis by the LDCs on fundamental rearrangements of international relations will generate demands which the organization is far less capable of serving than the comparatively simple demands of technical and economic assistance. UN podiums can be used to announce desired reforms for interstate relations, but can do little to implement or even legitimize those plans. To affect the patterns of relations outside its halls the UN must have the active involvement of all groups of states; to serve the new direction of LDC interests, the UN more than ever needs to be a global organization. Instead, the UN is rapidly becoming an organization with only one constituency, and an organization less capable of serving even that group's interests.

* *The ad hoc conference forum is becoming the preferred arena for the special concerns of both developing and industrial states. The 1974 food, population, and law of the sea conferences will be followed in 1975 by conferences on water, science and technology, housing, desertification, women, and, once again, law of the sea.*

Thus, if carried to an extreme, the new LDC pressures could undermine the remaining importance of the UN -- turning it into a diplomatic shell with little financial or political support -- and in a sense resolve the problem of US embarrassments in the General Assembly. At the same time, however, the US would lose the benefits derived from the Security Council and the specialized agencies. In the past it has been possible for the US to maintain different postures, consonant with the different atmospheres in the various UN bodies. The reformationist turn of the LDC movement will make such distinctions far more difficult. These trends can be reversed, and the UN made more hospitable and useful to the US, only if relations with the LDCs are improved outside the UN.